



De Anza College Leadership System Assessment Summary Report

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Leadership System Assessment

De Anza College

Background and Purpose

- Chancellor Lambert commissioned Leadership System Assessment in response to concerns raised by De Anza employees.
- PPL retained as an independent consulting firm to listen, gather data, and report back what employees shared.
- The findings reflect what employees told us through confidential interviews and focus groups. They are not conclusions imposed by the district or by us.
- De Anza has a strong foundation of dedicated faculty and staff, a history of student success, and deep roots in the community.
- *This assessment examined the leadership system, not the college's overall performance or the work being done every day on behalf of students.*

Leadership System Assessment

De Anza College

The *Leadership System Assessment Prospectus* identified four domains/areas of inquiry to be assessed in relationship to the overall coherence and effectiveness of the De Anza College leadership system.

These include:

- Leadership Presence and Accessibility
- Leadership Development and Succession
- Governance and Decision-Making Clarity
- Organizational Culture and Trust

CONTEXT: The four domains define the scope of the review. Findings in later slides should be read within this leadership-system scope, not as conclusions about all aspects of De Anza College.

Methodology – Data Collection

In order to assess the Leadership System at De Anza College data were collected from:

- 38 Individual Interviews – 30-60 minutes in length
 - Senior Leadership, Mid-level Administration, Supervisors and Managers, Confidentials, Classified Professionals, Former Executives of College and District, and Key District Executives.
- Five Focus Groups attended by a wide cross section of the College
- Review of several related institutional documents and websites

CONTEXT: Findings reflect recurring themes across interviews, focus groups, and institutional documents. They describe perceptions and patterns that PPL found significant enough to examine at the system level.

Seven Overarching Issues/Findings Related to the Leadership System Were Identified

Overarching Issue/Finding 1: Leadership System Weaknesses

Overarching Issue/Finding 2: Lack of Stable Presidential Leadership

Overarching Issue/Finding 3: De Anza College Has Historically Operated Independently of the Rest of the District

Overarching Issue/Finding 4: Lack of a Unifying Vision for the Future of De Anza College

Overarching Issue/Finding 5: Institution-wide Lack of Accountability

Overarching Issue/Finding 6: A Culture of Favoritism

Overarching Issue/Finding 7: Outdated Approach to Integrating the Core Values of Equity and Social Justice

CONTEXT: These seven findings describe accumulated system conditions across multiple leadership transitions. They are not attributed to a single president, administration, employee group, or point in time.

Leadership System Assessment

De Anza College

The report then provides findings specific to each of the four areas of inquiry.

These include:

- Leadership Presence and Accessibility
- Leadership Development and Succession
- Governance and Decision-Making Clarity
- Organizational Culture and Trust

The follow four slides provide samples of these findings.

CONTEXT: The next four slides provide examples, not the complete findings. Each domain also contains evidence of existing structures and practices that can be strengthened rather than rebuilt from scratch.

Sample of Findings Within Each Assessment Domains and Line of Inquiry

- **Leadership Presence and Accessibility**

(sample of findings)

- Leadership visibility and accessibility are experienced inconsistently across the college.
- Role clarity, leadership capacity, and support for managers and deans need immediate attention.
- College leadership team is widely perceived as fragmented.

CONTEXT: The concern is not that leadership is absent. The finding is that visibility, role clarity, support, and coordination are experienced inconsistently across the college.

Sample of Findings Within Each Assessment Domain and Line of Inquiry

2. Leadership Development and Succession

(sample of findings)

- The college does not have a consistent, institution-wide system for leadership development.
- Onboarding and support for role transitions are uneven at the college and succession planning and cross-training are limited.
- The current leadership environment is impacted by high levels of stress, strained relationships, low trust, and the lack of an emphasis on workplace wellness.

CONTEXT: The report identifies a system gap: leadership development, onboarding, cross-training, and succession are not yet consistent institution-wide practices.

Sample of Findings Within Each Assessment Domain and Line of Inquiry

3. *Governance and Decision-Making Clarity*

(sample of findings)

- Governance and decision-making at De Anza College require clearer definitions, consistent application, and stronger accountability.
- The lack of clarity creates confusion about how decisions are initiated, reviewed, approved, implemented, and communicated.
- Even though the shared governance decision-making process is well documented in the *Decision-Making Manual* and numerous related websites, there was consensus that the process is not always followed in practice.

CONTEXT: De Anza has a well-documented governance framework. The concern is the gap between documented processes and consistent practice, including clarity about consultation, recommendation, decision authority, implementation, and communication.

Sample of Findings Within Each Assessment Domain and Line of Inquiry

4. Organizational Culture and Trust

(sample of findings)

- Fear of retaliation appears to have a major effect on the culture at De Anza College.
- Middle managers and deans reported that they do not always feel heard, included, or supported in decision-making.
- Leadership instability and the pace of recent changes have contributed to fatigue and uncertainty.

CONTEXT: The report describes both commitment to the college and significant trust concerns. The recommended response is sustained attention to respectful engagement, reliable processes, communication, accountability, and follow-through.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The report lists 10 wide reaching Strategic Recommendations for Improvement in the Leadership System.

Actions to address the 10 strategic recommendations will need to be prioritized and systematically and strategically addressed over time. It is recommended that each recommendation be viewed and addressed through five progressive phases.

- These include:
 - Stabilize
 - Clarify
 - Build Capacity
 - Align
 - Reimage

CONTEXT: The recommendations are a multi-year improvement agenda. The first task is to establish priorities and capacity, not to launch ten separate initiatives.

Recommendation 1: *Establish a disciplined approach to time, capacity, and initiative management.*

Recommendation 2: *Rebuild trust through consistent communication, team building, and accountability for all employees.*

Recommendation 3: *Increase leadership presence, accessibility, and approachability.*

Recommendation 4: *Rebuild synergy and organizational stability before the Presidential Search, Selection and Onboarding.*

Recommendation 5: *Build a unified senior leadership team and reduce default siloing.*

CONTEXT: Recommendations 1–5 focus on the operating conditions needed for improvement: capacity, trust, visible leadership, organizational stability, and a more unified senior leadership team.

Recommendation 6: Develop a comprehensive leadership development, onboarding, and succession system.

Recommendation 7: Clarify governance, decision authority, and consultation expectations.

Recommendation 8: District leadership must take a proactive and sustained role in stabilizing and strengthening the De Anza leadership system.

Recommendation 9: Reexamine how De Anza integrates equity, social justice.

Review both structure and implementation: how commitments are defined and advocated, whose perspectives may be excluded, and whether practices are mission-aligned, student-centered, inclusive, and legally sound. This is not a recommendation to retreat from the college's equity and social justice commitments.

Recommendation 10: Provide professional outside support for implementation of the 90-day action plan and longer-term stabilization and renewal work.

CONTEXT: Recommendation 9 calls for examination and modernization of both structure and practice. It does not treat equity or social justice as the problem, nor does it recommend abandoning those commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EXPLORATION

- *Conduct an Institutional History & Continuity Review*
- *Create an Oral-History & Institutional-Memory Project*
- *Assess Leadership Transitions & Change Fatigue*
- *Identify and Preserve Effective Practices*
- *Strengthen Archives & Knowledge Transfer*
- *Establish Baseline Measures & Report Progress*

CONTEXT: These items are intended to preserve institutional memory and identify what has worked, not simply document problems. The report specifically calls for identifying and preserving effective practices.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

WHAT THE ASSESSMENT FOUND

De Anza has significant institutional strengths, including committed employees, a history of student success, deep community roots, and examples of innovation and collaboration.

At the same time, repeated leadership transitions and accumulated system weaknesses have contributed to unclear decision pathways, uneven coordination, inconsistent communication and follow-through, and diminished trust.

WHAT THE REPORT CONCLUDES

These are systemic conditions developed over time, not the result of a single individual or leader. Improvement will require coordinated college and district action, realistic sequencing, and sustained attention to leadership development, governance, accountability, and trust.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The report recommends beginning with stabilization and clear priorities, preserving effective practices, and building the conditions for a successful presidential transition and longer-term institutional renewal.

CONTEXT: The central message is not that De Anza lacks strengths. It is that the leadership system must be strengthened so those strengths can be sustained and translated into coordinated institutional progress.

Questions?